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ILLICIT DRUG TRAFFIC AND SUPPLY, INCLUDING REPORTS FROM SUBSIDIARY BODIES AND EVALUATION OF THEIR ACTIVITIES

Strategies for illicit supply reduction

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

A strategy aimed at reducing illicit cultivation of crops that serve as sources of narcotic drugs is presented and its evolution traced from its origins to the current concept of alternative development. A more detailed description of the current strategy is provided, including the guiding principles behind alternative development, its objectives and a number of specific elements that need to be taken into account in designing and implementing alternative development measures. Illicit supply reduction, taken in the broadest possible sense, would cover all aspects of drug abuse control not addressed by demand reduction. A range of illicit supply reduction strategies in that broad sense is indicated for comment by the Commission.

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INTRODUCTION

1. When examining the provisional agenda and documentation requirements for its thirty-eighth session, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs emphasized at its thirty-seventh session that it would be useful to have available to it existing background documentation on alternative development aimed at reducing illicit supply. At the same time, the Secretariat was invited to submit a note on possible strategies for illicit supply reduction.[1]

2. In response to that request, sensu stricto, the history, evolution and current status of alternative development as a strategy for illicit supply reduction are examined in section I of the present note.

3. As the Commission is aware, however, illicit supply reduction can also be interpreted to encompass all national, regional and international drug control activities other than those related to demand reduction. In that very broad sense, illicit supply reduction can cover a gamut of activities from illicit cultivation through illicit production, manufacture and distribution at all levels, as well as action taken by Governments against such activities through their law enforcement, regulatory and judicial authorities or other appropriate branches or services.

4. Since the Commission has before it at its thirty-eighth session an extensive agenda relating to demand reduction and follow-up action to General Assembly resolution 48/12 of 28 October 1993, the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) has not attempted to expand on the original request and include any consideration of the vastly broader subject alluded to above.

5. In section II of the present note, a range of illicit supply reduction strategies currently used by various countries is indicated. Detailed examination of such strategies would require a substantial input of time and resources by UNDCP. The Commission may wish to provide guidance to the Secretariat on the appropriate way to undertake such an examination.

I. ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT AS A STRATEGY FOR ILLICIT SUPPLY REDUCTION

6. Intensive efforts to reduce the amount of illicit cultivation of crops that are sources of narcotic drugs date from the early 1970s. The initial strategy adopted called for the replacement of illicit crops by other crops (crop substitution), which would provide equivalent income to subsistence farmers for whom the illicit crop offered the principal (or in some cases only) source of cash income. At the time, the bulk of the world total of illicit opium was produced under such circumstances, generally in remote areas with limited potential for development. The approach was developed and tested in Asia, and initially targeted the opium poppy.

7. By the late 1970s the strategy was revised in the light of experience already gained. It had become clear that while various crops could in most cases be identified as feasible substitutes on agricultural grounds, the marketing of those crops posed major problems, given the absence of infrastructure and the comparative ease with which opium could be stored and marketed. Furthermore, the ability of traffickers to adjust the price paid for opium placed additional limitations on the methodology. A broader strategy was thus adopted, embracing a methodology that is generally referred to as "integrated rural development", aimed not only at income, but also at the overall quality of life of the target population. Inputs included the improvement of education, health, infrastructure and social services, in addition to support for the introduction and marketing of alternative crops. Appropriate bans on

cultivation could be enforced once the areas concerned were, in effect, integrated into the mainstream of national socio-economic development.

8. The most prominent documented reductions of illicit cultivation through such measures pertain to opium poppy in Thailand and in parts of Pakistan. Net opium poppy cultivation in Thailand is estimated to have declined by at least 60 percent since the early 1980s, and possibly by as much as 80 or 90 per cent since the 1960s and 1970s, so that Thailand now contributes only an estimated 1 or 2 per cent of global illicit cultivation. In the case of Pakistan, opium poppy was successfully eliminated in several administrative areas of the North-West Frontier Province.

9. That more promising strategy still faced certain challenges, however, which were even more evident in the course of the 1980s, as it began to be applied not only in Asia, but also in coca-growing areas of Latin America. Displacement of illicit cultivation to new areas could negate the progress made, a phenomenon which has indeed occurred in both Asia and Latin America. Furthermore, the introduction by traffickers of cultivation into new, non-traditional areas for quick profit or to meet growing demand on the world market could offset gains made in traditional areas. A methodology based on relatively high-cost investments in "hard-core" growing areas could not expect to cover all the new areas. Attention would need to be given to the overall development of entire zones, so as to counter and ultimately prevent the spillover effect.

10. Any such approach could only work if it was part of a wider, balanced approach to the drug issue in the countries concerned, with the full support and participation of the local population. That much broader strategy, which emerged in the early 1990s and serves as the basis for current initiatives, is generally referred to as "alternative development". At its core is a recognition of the degree to which illicit cultivation is interwoven with numerous other issues which go well beyond the micro-economics and agronomy of illicit cultivation.

11. Responsibility for implementing a strategy based on alternative development rests on two guiding principles, as follows:

(a) Responsibility for the measures to be pursued in a given country must rest with the country concerned. That requires effective political support for drug abuse control in general, and for alternative development measures in particular, at both national and local levels. It also requires a willingness on the part of the country to incorporate such action into its existing economic and social programming mechanisms. External assistance has little chance of success if those preconditions are not met;

(b) Responsibility is also required at the international level. The situation in a target area can be considerably influenced by factors well beyond local control. A concurrent and concerted effort also to address global illicit demand and traffic is essential if alternative development measures are to achieve the degree of commitment and credibility they need at the country and local levels. The international community must also acknowledge and act on the need to incorporate the illicit cultivation issue into comprehensive investment and development cooperation initiatives. In that connection, successful application of the alternative development strategy requires that attention be given not only to the immediate areas of illicit cultivation but to entire zones, in order to ensure that the social and economic conditions do not favour spillover of illicit cultivation into new areas.

12. Alternative development must form part of a general policy for the sustained development of the countries and areas concerned. The basic principles of sustainable development thus apply to alternative development as well, both in the core areas of illicit cultivation and in vulnerable areas. Those principles, which are well known and accepted, are not described in the present note. Alternative

development also has, however, more specific and limited goals of its own, which are especially applicable to the primary target areas. As its purpose is the reduction of illicit cultivation, with basic socio-economic development serving as a methodology, those specific objectives need to be stated in ways that are relevant to crop reduction. They would include the following:

(a) Overcoming the structural factors that isolate the target areas and impede their integration into the national development process;

(b) Encouraging and developing alternatives to the cultivation of illicit drug crops by according priority to activities that have a tradition in the area and for which potential markets exist;

(c) Developing non-agricultural economic activities to the extent possible;

(d) Enhancing the administrative resources and ability to intervene of national and local authorities;

(e) Supporting local groups and associations that can perform a leadership role in awareness-raising to support the reduction of illicit cultivation.

13. Specific interventions should be based on preliminary studies into the economic as well as the social, cultural and political characteristics of the areas concerned, with a view to assessing the advisability of undertaking action and to determining the course of such action. Projects should be designed with due attention to the inclusion of concrete and measurable objectives.

14. The process of formulating specific projects and programmes should involve not only national or provincial authorities, but must also include local administrations, associations and other groups that can play a leadership role.

15. In most cases, alternative development will require the involvement of a variety of funding and development agencies, both national and international. That in turn requires an effective coordination mechanism.

16. Essential to the principle of alternative development is a negotiated agreement committing the beneficiaries to a gradual reduction in illicit cultivation, including clauses governing the gradual application of statutory bans.

17. A specific project or programme should also include a schedule for the phased withdrawal of the international assistance, combined with corresponding undertakings on the part of the national and local authorities or other local entities.

18. Given its complexity, alternative development requires constant monitoring, review and evaluation. Attention should be given not only to the progress being made in the specific target areas, but also to the broader effort aimed at channelling sustainable development inputs towards adjacent or nearby vulnerable areas and at ensuring the needed political and policy commitment at the national and local levels.

II. OUTLINE OF AN APPROACH TO STRATEGIES OF ILLICIT SUPPLY REDUCTION

19. A number of countries already undertake on their own behalf, or in conjunction with other countries, strategies to curtail illicit supply. Those strategies focus on a wide range of issues. Some concentrate on reducing crop supply, as is the case with alternative development discussed in the present note. In other instances the emphasis is on control of illicit production and manufacture. As with reducing crop supply, strategies such as the latter seek to prevent illicit drugs from coming on to markets in producer as well as consumer countries. Controls over diversion, whether of drugs themselves or precursors to be used in their illicit manufacture, likewise target availability of products.

20. The controls over illicit trafficking represent strategic approaches to limiting the international spread of drugs, and have formed a central part of efforts undertaken thus far to reduce illicit supply. Such strategies often involve significant cooperation among countries, and have been an important part of the work of the Secretariat in the field of supply reduction.

21. A further set of approaches has concentrated on the organizations and individuals involved in drug trafficking and the criminal activity related to it. Activities in that area involve the use of investigative and enforcement measures to bring the individuals concerned to justice and to dismantle or disrupt the organizations for which they work.

22. More recently, considerable attention has been devoted to strategies to limit money laundering and thereby reduce the potential profits from illicit drug transactions.

23. That range of strategic approaches covers the experience of a number of countries and organizations over differing periods of time and with varying degrees of commitment of resources. In some instances, those approaches have been partially evaluated, although a comprehensive examination, including a review of their potential for mutual reinforcement, does not appear to have been undertaken.

Action by the Commission

24. Should the Commission wish to examine the issues in further detail, it would be necessary to consider priority areas of the above-mentioned approaches that the Secretariat should examine with a view to providing appropriate documentation for a future session.

Notes

[1]Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1994, Supplement No. 10 (E/1994/30), para. 158.